Former Aide of Dr. King To Perform Ray Wedding

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A minister who was instrumental in Dr. Martin Luther King's coming to Memphis shortly before he was shot to death here in 1968 says he will perform the prison marriage ceremony of James Earl Ray, who pleaded guilty to the 1968 killing of the civil rights leader.

Lawson

The Rev. James Lawson, formerly pastor of the Centenary Methodist Church in Memphis, said the marriage of Ray to a Knoxville artist, Anna Sandhu, 32, would take place Thursday or Friday at the Brushy Mountain Prison in East Tennessee where Ray is serving a 99-year term.

"The warden has approved," the minister said. "Her family will be there but there will be no press."

Lawson, now pastor of the Holman United Methodist Church in Los Angeles, had been a long-time friend of King's since the early days of the formation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Lawson spent time studying in India, and, like King, was a believer in Gandhi's nonviolent approach to activism.

Lawson helped influence Dr. King to come to Memphis in behalf of the striking sanitation workers in Memphis in 1968.

Reached at his home in Los Angeles this morning, Lawson told *The Press-Scimitar*, "I am convinced that he (Ray) did not kill Dr. King."

Lawson said he reached the conclusion after he had made a study of the King assassination and had talked to Ray for three or four hours last year in Ray's cell.

Lawson said the motive attributed to Ray — racism — for the killing "does not fit with what I know of the man, does not fit with anything about the man. If you said he killed King for pay, then maybe, but he is not a racist."

Lawson said Ray's whole background was that of a petty thief.

"James Earl Ray and I are the same age," he said. "In the generation we came out of thieves did not murder people when they robbed them. Criminals were more professional then. Those who spent their lives as thieves did not mix murder with their robberies. This was a sociological difference. It no longer exists among the young people today who rob and murder and have no concept of the blood and guts of violence."

Lawson said he believes "the names of the murderers will eventually come out. Someday the courts will grant James Earl Ray a trial and the truth then will come out," said Lawson.

"But clearly even if James Earl Ray were the killer beyond the shadow of a doubt and Dr. King could return to perform the marriage, he would do it," the minister said. "Anyone who couldn't understand that didn't know Martin Luther King. For him, love served as the basis for community and justice."

He said Ray and Ms. Sandhu, a divorcee, asked him to perform the ceremony.

"We ministers are in the world to stand by people and demonstrate the grace of God in life," the pastor said.

Lawson, the Rev. Jesse Jackson and other black leaders met with Ray in prison last summer and said they would work for a new trial for Ray.

Lawson said he met Ms. Sandhu after a visit with Ray last July and also had several long conversations with her in August in Washington, D.C. They were in Washington to attend the House Assassinations Committee hearings, at which Ray testified.

It has been reported Ms. Sandhu met the 50-year-old Ray in 1977 while sketching him for television during a court appearance.